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ABSTRACT

A general analysis of professional development school (PDS) efforts indicates that, overall, the partnership efforts that were studied devote significantly less attention to ideas about the nature of schools, learning, teaching, the knowledge base for teaching, and teacher learning and professional development than they devote to establishing university-school arrangements, the mechanics of the operation, and the interpersonal relationships involved in bringing university teacher educators and preK-12 teachers together. New teacher induction appears to be the focus of most PDS efforts, but this induction is compromised by insufficient attention to altering the context in which student teachers and beginning teachers learn to teach. The paper suggests that PDS goals should be focused more directly and intensely on improving student and teacher learning. Efforts to reach these goals should be driven by four visions: (1) schools as morally based communities of learners; (2) learning as experience-based intellectual construction; (3) teaching as professional problem solving; and (4) professional knowledge as the knowledge of practice. In addition, PDS efforts should be connected as much as possible to compatible reform proposals and recent thinking about knowledge construction, professional development, and adult learning. (Contains 27 references.) (IAH)

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Beyond the PDS: Schools as Professional Learning Communities
A Proposal Based on an Analysis of PDS Efforts of the 1990's

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Beyond the PDS: Schools as Professional Learning Communities
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Introduction

In recent years, numerous universities and schools have collaborated in developing professional development schools as efforts to improve upon the induction of new teachers into their first jobs and into the teaching profession in general. These professional development schools come in numerous forms and sizes, from those that are true innovations to others that are nothing more than name changes for traditional student teaching. This paper is based on a general analysis of professional development school efforts over the last five years, with closer looks at several specific efforts. The analysis has been intended to do the following:

1). to identify the conceptual bases upon which university-school professional development partnerships rest, including their undergirding images of

(a) the nature of schools as places, institutions, and organizations
(b) the nature of learning
(c) the nature of teaching
(d) the nature of the knowledge base for teaching, teacher learning, and teacher professional development;

2). to compare these conceptualizations with ideas described in recent research and scholarly literature and related appeals for education reform;

3). to determine the extent to which those who conduct university-school partnerships and PDS endeavors follow their own conceptualizations in practice;

4) to assess the extent to which the conceptualizations enhance or inhibit the partnership efforts;

5) to propose additional (possibly new) conceptualizations about schools, learning, teaching, professional knowledge, and teacher professional development that will improve partnership efforts.

General Conclusions from the Study

The analysis shows that the partnership efforts that were studied (and probably partnership and PDS efforts in general) devote significantly less attention to ideas about the nature of schools, learning, teaching, the knowledge base for teaching, and teacher learning and professional development than the attention they devote to establishing university-school arrangements, to the mechanics of the operation, and to the interpersonal relationships involved in bringing university teacher educators and pre-K-12 teachers together. The main focus of nearly all efforts is inducting new teachers into schools. Little attention is devoted to helping university teacher educators or experienced pre-K-12 school faculty study their own practice, improve their work, or reform what they do. In essence, beginning teachers, interns, and student teachers are seen as those to be taught and university faculty and experienced classroom teachers are seen as those who already know. The general goal is to prepare beginning teachers better than "the old way" but to prepare them for teaching in a context of old ideas about schools, learning, teaching, and teacher

professional development.

Much of this thinking and activity of partnerships and PDSs is not congruent with the research literature or reform-oriented scholarly writing on schools as organizations, on school leadership, on the nature of learning, on the professional nature of teaching practice, on the knowledge base for teaching, and on adult learning, reflective practice, and teacher development. Because partnerships and PDS efforts concentrate their efforts on helping teacher inductees get started, they (1) see these new teachers as the only primary learners among the professionals involved (they see university faculty and experienced teachers as teachers of the inductees, not as learners), and (2) devote most of their efforts to building organizational structures, mechanics of operation, and interpersonal relationships that concentrate on the induction process.

The partnerships devote little attention (1) to helping university faculty and experienced pre-K-12 teachers analyze their own work and behavior; (2) to rethinking or recreating schools as organizations; (3) to reconceptualizing the learning of school students; (4) to advancing teaching as a professional practice; (5) to adding to the knowledge base for teaching; or (6) to applying ideas about adult learning, reflective practice, and teacher development to the continued education of experienced teachers. They tend to accept their participating schools as they are at the start of the collaboration except for the new induction process; they see teaching as a craft taught to novices by those with more practical experience; they understand the knowledge base for teaching as craft knowledge rather than constructed from theory; and they overlook the learning needs of university teacher educators and experienced teachers except when university faculty teach pre-K–12 teachers a new curriculum package or a new approach to teaching. To a great extent, they perpetuate the following ideas, which educational scholars and reformers challenge: schools are technical-rational, top-down, factory-like institutions; teaching is a non-theoretically-based craft; a dichotomy exists between educational research and practice; a dichotomy also exists between pre-service and in-service teaching; experienced teachers have little need for continued learning and change; and university professors generate new knowledge about teaching, while pre-K–12 teachers do not (they *only* teach).

Rethinking Is Needed

Based on this study of PDSs, I suggest that university-school partnerships be radically rethought in two ways: (1) that they adopt and be guided by a single purpose or mission, that of improving student learning and teaching; and (2) that they incorporate into what they do and hope to accomplish up-to-date conceptualizations of the nature of schools, of learning, of teaching, of the knowledge base for teaching, and of teacher professional development. I believe this can be accomplished if university-school partnerships are thought of as sub-parts of larger, full-scale professional learning communities that accept and promote the newest and best ideas about schools, learning, teaching, and professional development. I also suggest that if this is not done, many university-school partnerships will continue to be nothing more than new arrangements to induct beginning teachers into ineffective, static, factory-like schools, and into a professional environment that views teaching as a craft rather than as a profession.

My primary criticisms of most current PDSs are that their university-school partnership participants (1) do not focus on improving student learning and teaching enough, (2) do not think broadly enough in a more general context, and (3) do not dream creatively enough. They try to build better connections and smoother relationships between university-based teacher education and "real" schools when both need to be seriously transformed. They consider improved connections and relationships as goals to be accomplished when they should be thought of as rather meager first steps toward the goals of improved student learning and teaching.

All of this can be changed if (1) the primary work now done by most PDSs is re-thought of as *means* that move schools and teaching toward *visions* of what schools, student learning, and teaching *should be;* and (2) if the overall task to be accomplished is conceptualized as something

much greater than installing a sequence of slight improvements in current ways things are now done in schools.

Four Visions of What Should Be

To do this, visions need to be formulated of what schools, learning, teaching, and teacher education should be like. Then, these visions need to be used as beacons for travel into the distance as the work on improving each of the four elements of the education enterprise is pursued. Questions attached to the beacons that can guide the travel include: What are the central purposes of schools and how can these purposes be better served? What constitutes student learning and how can it be improved? What is the essence of teaching and what does quality teaching look like in practice? How can teacher education be of better help to schools, teachers, and students?

I suggest four visions of *what should be* as appropriate guides for PDS participants, as well as for other education reformers, restructurers, and university-school partners if they are going to rethink and recreate schools, learning, teaching, and teacher education as much and as thoroughly as is needed. Each vision is described briefly below.

Schools as Morally Based Communities of Learners

When schools are thought of as they should be, they ought to be conceptualized as cultural communities rather than physical places, buildings, organizations, institutions, or clusters of employees who work together. As cultural communities, they must have a mission and shared core values. All community members--students, teachers, school staff, and parents--must possess a sincere commitment to achieving the mission and believe in the core values sincerely and deeply. They must belong to the community and be wanted by all of its members. All members must possess a sense of loyalty, camaraderie, and collegiality that draws everyone into a common bond. Individual attachments to the community must be so strong that they supersede individual personal desires so that everyone helps each other toward their common goals. In essence, a shared mission and a common belief in core community values must permeate every aspect of school life and must guide and drive every school decision and activity.

Student learning must be recognized and celebrated as the central mission of all pre-K-12 schools and every other school purpose and every school activity must serve common visions of all students learning at the highest possible level. This is, of course, the commonly recognized mission of schools, but reformers, restructurers, and partnership participants need to remind themselves of that fact more forcefully and continuously and to use it as their ultimate guide for creating better schools.

Learning as Experience-Based Intellectual Construction

When learning is thought of as it should be, it ought to be conceptualized in the form of a three-part intellectual process by which learners (1) gain ideas from new learning experiences, (2) match these ideas with what they have already learned, and (3) construct their own personal meaning, develop their own competence, and formulate their own values. The process should be though of as occurring because of the experiences that teachers provide for learners, rather than because of ideas that the teachers give to them. It ought to be conceived of in terms of what learners do much like the idea expressed in the following quote from John Holt about playing the cello:

> Most people would say that what I am doing is "learning to play" the cello. But these words carry into our minds the strange idea that there exists two very different processes: (1) learning to play the cello; and (2) playing

> the cello. They imply that I will do the first until I have completed it, at which point I will stop the first process and begin the second. In short, I will go on "learning to play" until I have "learned to play" and then I will begin to play. Of course, this is nonsense. There are not two processes, but one. We learn to do something by doing it. There is no other way. (Reproduced in Canfield and Hansen, 1993, p.132.)

With this image of learning, students come to be thought of as community members who experience learning much like when they participate in summer camp, in a concert orchestra, on an athletic team, or at an audience-involving play production. They are not thought of as products that come from factories in which teacher-workers produce learned students. Students learn from their participation in school experiences rather than from absorbing sets of ideas, skills, or value perspectives that their teachers give to them.

For this kind of learning to happen, teachers need to create learning experiences for students rather than produce anything, and they need to see to it that all students participate. In fact, the learning experiences that they create need to be available to and engaged in by all community members -- themselves, school staff members, parents, as well as students.

Teachers also need to think of teaching as a profession that includes their own personal, experience-based, continuous learning as one of its integral parts. They need to struggle against thinking of professional learning as something they do *in order to become* a teacher or as a parallel activity that accompanies teaching. They must see learning and teaching as a single common experience. Administrators must also realize that they learn from their own everyday work and use that learning to improve how they help teachers pursue the community's mission.

Teaching as Professional Problem-Solving

When teaching is thought of as it should be, it ought to be conceptualized as a career-long process of professional problem-solving, a process that starts when future teachers are still classroom students and does not stop before retirement, if it stops then. The process combines learning to teach and doing teaching into one common professional endeavor and is as continuous as John Holt's learning to play the cello.

As problem-solving, teaching consists of two successive teacher tasks: (1) figuring out ways in which to educate the students for whom the teacher is responsible, and (2) trying in the classroom what he or she thinks will work. When the problem-solving is successful, students learn. When it is not, teachers reassess and try to solve the problem again.

In line with the constructivist idea of learning mentioned above, when teaching is thought of as professional problem-solving, it becomes a professional intellectual investigation that includes constant personal construction of new professional knowledge, constant personal development of refined professional skills, and constant personal sorting out of professional value perspectives. Teachers come to understand, more clearly than most now do, that they do not learn to teach by simply receiving information from others or by replicating the teaching that they experienced. They *construct* their own professional knowledge, skills, and value perspectives by drawing on all of their life experiences and formulating from them their own unique professional ways of understanding and doing things. They go beyond teaching the ways their teachers taught them or the ways their college professors told them to teach. They also look at their own practice; study, analyze, reflect upon what they do in their own classrooms; and build the ideas they develop from this self-study into their own professional theories. Then, they use these personally constructed theories for future practice, always revising and always building toward better teaching and better student learning. Because teaching is problem-solving, teachers draw from research-based theory,

from what they read and hear, from the examples of others, and from their own trial and error efforts. In the process, they select ideas and examples from others good practice for their classrooms, not as if the work of others serves as exemplars to be adopted uncritically, but as information from which to form their own personal professional judgments, to construct their own professional practice.

In my view, teaching is too complex and too tied to the unique circumstances and individuals in a particular classroom to be thought of as a craft that can be learned primarily on a college campus or in summer or after-school workshops and then applied through a relatively short period of guided practice, called student teaching, internship, or implementation. It is not something learned at the start of a professional career and then repeated for twenty-five to thirty years. It is also not something done according to prescriptions handed down by school administrators, supervisors, curriculum committees, textbook authors, or outsiders who develop packaged programs.

Teaching as professional problem-solving is, instead, a multi-faceted endeavor in which intelligent, highly skilled, and self-analytical professionals continuously combine the doing of teaching, learning to teach, and studying teaching; and they do so throughout their entire professional careers. The endeavor does not involve separations between theory and practice, between research and implementation, or between pre-service and in-service teacher learning. It does not divide teachers into the currently popular novice-expert categories, although it does acknowledge a developmental continuum through teachers' professional careers. It also does not accept as appropriate the idea that bureaucratically designated instructional leaders with hierarchical authority have the necessary knowledge and expertise to prescribe how teachers should teach.

When teaching is conceived of as professional problem-solving, teachers are seen as the primary experts in schools and their work is considered to be the most prized thing schools do. The primary roles of all other participants in the school community -- administrators, other staff members, and parents -- are support for teachers.

When teaching is conceived of in these ways, teachers think of their professional learning, as being intertwined with every other aspect of their lives. They learn from all life experiences, including from every lesson they teach and from every interaction with colleagues, students, and classes; and they use that learning in their future work. The process continues for as long as they teach and is both guided and driven by their constantly asked question, How can I teach better? Similarly, the work of every other professional in the school community, including all those in administrative and supervisory positions, is guided by a parallel question, How can I help?

Professional Knowledge as the Knowledge of Practice

When the professional knowledge, competence, and value perspectives that teachers need to possess are thought of as they should be, that knowledge, that competence, and those values ought to be conceptualized as knowledge personally constructed by teachers, competence personally developed by teachers, and value perspectives personally formulated by teachers in the context of their professional work. The conceptualization should include at least four intermingled elements, the first of which I have already mentioned. They are as follows:

One, professional knowledge, skills, and values of teachers are constructed by teachers themselves rather than absorbed from elsewhere. Admittedly, teachers gather information from college professors, textbooks, their own experiences as students, cooperating teachers, consultants, research studies, the practices of colleagues, and so forth; but all of these are only sources of ideas, skills, and values that teachers turn to in order to construct and develop their own unique ways of knowing, doing things, and believing. They build this knowledge, develop this competence, and formulate these values based on their own background and experience.

Two, teachers construct and develop their knowledge, skills, and values in the context of how they *use* that new knowledge, and those new skills and values. They ask themselves, for

example, how the information they are told in a lecture or the skill they see another teacher demonstrate will fit with their own ways of doing things and work with their own students and in their own classrooms. How they answer these types of questions, not only affects how and if they use the knowledge, but it also affects the very nature of that knowledge. And the same point also applies to skills and values. This happens because teachers determine the validity of ideas and the appropriateness of skills and value perspectives differently from the ways in which the validity and appropriateness are assessed by college teacher educators, administrators, and policy specialists. For teachers, the validation comes in terms of how well their own students learn. Because of the need for this type of validation, the value of any set of professional knowledge, skills, and value perspectives, as far as teachers are concerned, is determined by its utility in helping individual teachers teach rather than by its esoteric origin. The reputation of the developer of a recommended teaching procedure and the sophistication of the research project in which it was developed are less important than the teacher's belief, after trial in his or her classroom, that it helps students learn.

Three, the places that teachers turn to as sources of knowledge, skills, and values are not all external to themselves and their classrooms. Teachers also generate their own educational theories from their personal teaching, reflection on that teaching, and self-analysis. Each day they teach, they learn from what they try, how it works, how students respond, the social context in which it takes place, how they assess all of this, and so forth. This learning from practice simply happens as a normal part of teaching. When it works well, teachers formulate their in-class learning into personal, practical theories that they use in subsequent teaching, they communicate these theories to other teachers, and, in turn, they use in their classrooms similar theories developed by their colleagues.

Four, because teachers are adults and continuously developing professionals, all the principles of both adult learning and evolutionary professional development apply to their learning and, in turn, to their evolving knowledge, skills, and value perspectives. At any given time in their individual careers, teachers possess ideas, competencies, and value perspectives that are different for those they possessed a short time earlier or will possess a short time in the future. They, like all humans, never stop thinking, learning, and changing. At times they even back-slide. They forget, lose proficiency, and narrow their perspective.

When teaching is thought of as professional practice, the knowledge, skills, and values that teachers possess and use in their professional work to create learning are not limited to pre-service professional education; to craft knowledge passed on by other master crafts-persons; to that which is absorbed from books, lectures, workshops, and research reports; and to individual teacher trial and error guided by common sense. The knowledge, skills, and values are developed from all of the above and other sources as well. In that way of seeing things, teaching, studying teaching, and educating teachers are three facets of the same enterprise, not three separate endeavors to be conducted independently by teachers, researchers, and teacher educators.

A Context of Interconnectedness

Ideas about the nature of schools, learning, teaching, and teacher professional knowledge and competence such as these are not new, and they are readily available for reformers, restructurers, and university-school partners to use as guides for their work. They are scattered across contemporary scholarly literature in many specific areas of study, including education reform, school restructuring, organizational cultures, institutional leadership, the nature of knowledge, the nature of learning, teaching effectiveness, adult learning, reflective practice, and so forth. But, the ideas in each of these areas of study, as well as those in many other domains, seem to be pursued by reformers in relative isolation from each other, and, when reformers are attracted to specific ideas, they seem to apply them to educational practice as single innovations or one-shot solutions for particular problems.

These isolated approaches to reform ignore both the interconnectedness of learning, teaching,

school contexts, and teacher development and the multi-facted, complex, and continuous nature of educational change. For example, most PDS developers seek to replace the ways in which new teachers are inducted but ignore broader needed changes in schools. Most reform proposals concerning teaching effectiveness and accountability overlook research information about organizational communities and impose in top-down fashion procedures and accountability standards that experts who study institutional leadership reject as unworkable. Similarly, school restructuring and university-school partnership proposals tend to ignore the latest thinking about the construction of knowledge, professional development, and adult learning.

A lack of connection also exists between researchers who develop ideas for improving schools, learning, and teaching and those in schools who are expected to put the ideas into practice. For example, many of those who study teaching and make the recommendations for change that they expect others to implement concentrate their energies on formulating theories from controlled research studies and paper-and-pencil scholarship, without attending carefully enough to the contexts of practice and to the ways in which their ideas can be applied in these contexts. Although there are very noticeable exceptions, these research-based theory generators tend to see research and practice as a one-way, theory-to-practice flow and they deny responsibility once the flow reaches the classroom door. Moreover, they seem to denigrate theory that is developed from practice. A specific illustration of this phenomenon is reflected in the lack of professional connection between many researchers who study constructivist learning and teacher educators and curriculum specialists who try to teach teachers about constructivism even though their understanding of the idea is second-handed and superficial. Because of this disconnect those instructing teachers approach the implementation process mechanistically and teach the teachers in non-constructivists, didactic ways.

Although there are more good ideas about making schools, teaching, and teacher education better than all education reformers and classroom teachers can collectively introduce into common classroom practice in their lifetimes, few of these specific ideas, including the ones that actually have the potential for improving student learning and the quality of teaching in wide-spread and noticeable ways, will become common practice unless education improvers of all types and at all levels become more successful at creating more profound changes in school and classroom practice than they have been until now. And, to do this, they need (1) to coalesce as many of the good ideas that are compatible and that they can keep track of at one time and (2) to develop a carefully selected number of them to be inserted into the real world of classroom teachers and the real lives of students. In the process of doing this, they must realize that these ideas have to be transformed as they are constructed and reconstructed in the minds and work of real teachers in actual classrooms and schools. In effect, each idea about how to improve schools, learning, teaching, and teacher education must be abstracted from one context and rebuilt in other settings. The innovations must be seen by teaching practitioners as useful new ways of doing things and these "new ways" must result in improved student learning.

Some disconnectedness is only natural. It is understandable that educational researchers and innovators have to focus on specific areas of study. They cannot investigate everything simultaneously or change everything at once. Their expertise and interests are limited. They do not know enough to study all facets of teaching, learning, and schools, and, if they did, an attempt to make general improvements in all these areas at one time for all teachers and all students would be foolhardy. Researchers, reformers, and implementors have to devote their attention to doable tasks and pursue changing some aspects of the education enterprise while other areas remain relatively stable. So, they specialize and try to fix one or a few things at a time.

Nevertheless, I believe efforts at making schools, learning, teaching, and teacher education better must be placed into a context that reflects the complex interconnectedness of the education enterprise and makes it clear to all that making the changes that are needed involves more than a number of individual, parallel, linear processes. That broader context also needs to reflect a view of present day schools, learning, teaching, and teacher education, not as static phenomena that are

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set at fixed points in time from which they can be moved forward rather simplistically, but as multiple parts of a mammoth enterprise floating on a sea of constant change.

Because the tasks before us involve so many ideas, so many players, so many aspects of the education enterprise, and so many specific settings, and because the figuring out of better ways of doing things must occur while schools, teaching, and teacher education continue to function (we cannot stop everything and start over), the tasks are unbelievably complicated, often un-understandable, messy, and un-nerving. This explains why the university-school-partnership-developed and administrator-imposed, top-down, technical-rational ways of changing schools, with their well stated objectives and precise pre-developed plans for others to implement, have not served us well. Reliance on something closer to chaos theory might be more useful as our general guide. We cannot all march in the same direction toward predictable ends, but, as we experiment with separate reform agendas, we must stay informed of others' work, educate ourselves along the way, and appreciate the magnitude of the general effort. When we need a rationalization to sustain us along the way, we can say: If the tasks of making schools, learning, teaching, and teaching education better were easier than they are, we would have been more successful by now.

The four visions that I have outlined -- (1) the community nature of schools, (2) the constructivist nature of learning, (3) the problem-solving nature of teaching, and (4) the personally constructed nature of teacher knowledge and competence -- are my ways of thinking about the many facets of school improvement in a broad, interconnected, and forward-looking context. I believe the visions can provide direction for individual reformers, restructurers, and university-school collaborators, as well as for reform as a general coherent movement. They can also help reformers see the importance of interacting with and informing each other and see the value of being guided by ideas that are, at a minimum, compatible.

A Broader Mission

My proposal is a rather direct one. PDS efforts need to attempt to do more than find new ways to induct beginning teachers into the profession as it currently exist, and that is what most PDS efforts now do. They accept uncritically present ideas of the nature of schools, learning, teaching, and teacher professional development, and they function within these contexts. Instead of accepting the current thinking about schools, learning, teaching, and so forth, they need to stimulate a rethinking of all facets of the education enterprise. They need to help create schools, learning, and teaching of the future. They need to induct beginning teacher into schools as they should be rather than as they now are.

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